



The Office of Congressman John Lewis

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT REAUTHORIZATION FACTSHEET

Since 1994, Congressman Lewis has been a strong supporter of the Violence Against Women Act. Following a disturbing conversation with Fulton County District Attorney Paul Howard, the Congressman became the House leader on teen dating violence prevention.

There has been a shocking increase in abusive youth relationships in Metro Atlanta and across the nation. In addition to sponsoring an annual resolution and congressional briefing recognizing Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention Month in February, the Congressman introduced legislation to focus on this alarming trend. The most recent version of this legislation, the SMART Teen Dating Violence Prevention and Awareness Act, is included in the broader bipartisan Senate and House Republican VAWA reauthorization proposals.

On May 14, 2012, Congressman Lewis joined Reps. Mike Quigley (D-IL) and David Reichert (R-WA) in hosting a congressional briefing on Engaging Men in Violence Prevention. This briefing discussed how to include males of all ages, both victims and potential abusers, in both prevention and treatment strategies.

Outlining the Key Differences between the House Republican and Bipartisan Senate VAWA Proposals

A critical part of the VAWA reauthorization process is to look for gaps in the system and adjust the national plan accordingly. While VAWA has been successful in reducing cases of domestic abuse in most adult relationships, youth, GLBT, immigrant, and Native American communities continue to need increased, updated legal protections.

The Senate introduced and passed S. 1925, a bipartisan bill to update the Violence Against Women Act. Like any legislative proposal produced by the Senate, this legislation was negotiated and moderated well before it was introduced. Unfortunately, the House Republican legislation, H.R. 4970, rolls back protections in four core areas –

1) Eliminating immigrant victims' protections.

The Republican bill strikes the confidentiality of immigrant victims' self-petitions efforts – thus increasing the advantage that alleged abusers have over their victims. This was a bipartisan improvement adopted in 1996 immigration reform legislation. The bill also fails to increase the number of U visas, a long-needed law enforcement tool to protect victims of domestic abuse and prosecute their abusers.

2) Tying the hands of American Indian tribes.

An overwhelming percentage of domestic and dating violence which occurs on Native American lands takes place between a Native American partner and a non-tribal member. The Senate bill includes updates to fill a jurisdictional gap. The House bill strikes these protections and leaves the vacuum open to predators.

3) Making College Campuses Safe.

The 5th Congressional District of Georgia is home to many outstanding colleges and universities. Unfortunately, the House Republican bill eliminates Campus SaVE, a provision of VAWA to help colleges and universities address dating abuse and sexual assault, increase violence-prevention education, improve related campus services and expand university reporting requirements.

4) Removing LGBT protections.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered victims experience domestic violence at the same rate as the general population. House Republicans stripped language to ensure equal legal treatment to LGBT victims of abuse.

Combined, the House Republican failure to include these most basic, 21st century protections only encourages abusers to manipulate existing loopholes in current law. H.R. 4970 fails to apply lessons-learned, modern day tools to combat domestic violence. This bill rolls back the clock to a period that many never want to witness or experience again.

VAWA Background

Since 1994, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) has provided a national roadmap to combating domestic violence and sexual assault in every corner of our nation.

Originally signed into law in 1994, this landmark legislation was updated in 2000 and in 2005 with strong, bipartisan support. VAWA provides a clear, national plan to prevent and protect domestic and sexual violence against women, men, and children.

For almost two decades, this legislation has led to the successful reduction of domestic abuse and the prosecution of perpetrators. Until recently, the reauthorization effort has always been a bipartisan, reflective process to adapt the law to improve preventing, protecting, and prosecuting domestic violence and sexual assault cases.